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ABSTRACT

Arguing for a feminist appropriation of the organizational culture approach to the study of complex formal organizations, this paper contends that, far from being an alternative approach that facilitates asking radically different questions about organizational life, the organizational culture approach's radical intentions are undermined by the failure to question its own biases. Following an introduction that pinpoints the androcentric and hegemonic nature or the concept of organizational culture, the paper challenges the empiricist methods of traditional organizational communication research and suggests the need for feminist readings that contest the authority of men as the sole authors of cultural texts. The next section of the paper discusses the implicit dualisms inherent in the concept of culture: culture as a rational, public, and male domain is held antithetical to and privileged over nature as the emotional domain, the private sphere, and women. The major section of the paper presents a review of research studies by organizational culture scholars and proposes a feminist criticism of these studies. The following section then offers and discusses alternative research studies by Kathy Ferguson and Angela McRobbie, two feminist scholars. The paper concludes with the presentation of a preliminary agenda for reconstituting the practices and politics of organizational scholarship by developing a feminist discourse commensurate with the radical intent of the organizational culture approach. Notes and extensive references are attached. (NKA)

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RETHINKING THE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE APPROACH

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RETHINKING THE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE APPROACH

The organizational culture approach to the study of complex formal organizations has been proclaimed an alternative to traditional approaches that allows us to ask radically different questions about organizational life. In this paper I challenge that claim, arguing that the radical intentions of this alternative are undermined by the failure to radically question its own biases. But the intent of the project may be redeemed in a feminist appropriation that repoliticizes and eroticizes the cultural analysis of organizations. This possibility is developed by taking the work of two contemporary feminist scholars as exemplary models and by proposing a preliminary agenda for reconstituting the practices and politics of organizational scholarship.

RETHINKING THE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE APPROACH

I. Introduction

The notion of culture as a heuristic metaphor (Van Maanan and Barley, 1985) for the analysis of organizational communication has been proclaimed an alternative marking "a new path of inquiry that will allow us to ask radically different, yet interesting, questions about organizations" (Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982, p. 117). Yet the radical questions asked by those who study organizational culture have not been radical enough to query its own biases and prejudices. Specifically, the androcentric and hegemonic nature of "organizational culture" has remained unquestioned. However, from a feminist perspective, the notion of culture becomes a site of radical critique concerned with the constitutive meanings and practices of both organizational life and organizational scholarship.

In The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy, Ferguson charges that "most contemporary political and social thought about organizational society . . . serves as apologia" (1984, p. xii). Feminist theory has "the capacity to help us resist the steady incursion of bureaucratic discourse" and the vision to develop alternative, non-oppressive forms of organizing. This paper contends that organizational culture as it is currently conceived and used in the study of organizational communication perpetuates stereotyes and biases that oppress women because it fails to acknowledge or consider women's experience or the revolutionary potential of the feminist perspective. In other words, the

promise of the organizational culture approach is undermined by its own biases. Nevertheless, the radical intentions of the approach may be taken up through a feminist appropriation. It is the thesis of this paper that the radical promise implicit in the project of the organizational culture approach may be realized through a feminist perspective on organizational life. The possibility is developed by advancing some exemplary feminist studies as models for research and a preliminary agenda for reconstituting the practices and politics of organizational scholarship.

II. Organizational Culture: Concept and Method

A. Conceptualization

In their seminal article, Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo explain, "We have labelled our approach the 'organizational culture' approach because we want to indicate that what constitutes the legitimate realm of inquiry is everything that constitutes organizational life" (1982, p. 122). Their explanation is reminiscent of William's infamous definition of culture as "a whole way of life": "The 'pattern of culture' is a selection and configuration of interests and activities, and a particular valuation of them, producing a distinct organisation, a 'way of life' (The Long Revolution, p. 47; cited in Thompson, p. 32). The feminist perspective radicalizes the holistic inquiry: "Whose way of life?" Simply asking such a question calls to account the notion of culture that informs the cultural approach to organizational communication. For example, the interpretive anthropology of Geertz is cited as the model for the

Pacanowsky-O'Donnell-Trujillo approach; Geertz's definition of culture clearly betrays an androcentric bias in universalizing the experience of men through the use of "man" as a generic term: culture is "an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which **men** communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (1973, p. 89; emphasis mine). Ironically, this definition also serves as an illustration of the bias of history and tradition, for the "inherited conceotions" of Western culture and bureaucratic organization are of and by men, just as Geertz says. Yet there is in the notion of culture an effort to grasp a primary mode and consequence of experience; the concept cannot be disgarded nor dismissed for as Moschkovich observes,

> culture [i]s not really something I have a choice in keeping or disgarding. It is in me and of me. Without it I would be an empty shell and so would anyone else. There was a psychology experiment carried out once in which someone was hypnotized and first told they had no future; the subject became happy and careless as a child. When they were told they had no past they became catatonic (cited in Kramarae and Treichler, 1986, p. 112).

A feminist perspective on organizational culture insists on confronting the tradition of oppression and recovering the history of resistance that is women's experience of organizational life. Without such confrontation, its revolutionary potential is defused; it becomes catatonic. In much the same vein, Thompson criticizes William's definition of culture as too passive and impersonal. He argues for a "notion of culture as experience which has been 'handled' in specifically human ways" and which "raises questions of activity and agency"

(p. 33). The study of culture in this sense becomes for Thompson "the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of **conflict.** And a way of conflict is a way of **struggle**" (p. 33). Thompson's reformulation is realized in the feminist perspective on culture in the organization as a site of conflict, struggle, oppression and resistance.

B. Research Methods

The empiricist methods of traditional organizational communication research (Redding, 1985; Tompkins, 1984) are inappropriate for such an approach. The study of organizational culture is more properly an "anthropological" inquiry; in Smircich's words, "For us to see organizations in cultural terms is to understand them as symbolically constituted and sustained within a wider pattern of significance" (1985, p. 66). According to Smircich, understanding involves acts of appreciation, critical reading, and interpretation (1985, p. 66).

Organizational communication scholars have begun to struggle with the implications of such an approach. Conrad argues that in contrast to traditional research, an interpretive inquiry adopts a critic's stance to offer a critical reading encompassing both confrontation and evaluation of textual data (the symbolic acts of organizational members [1985, p. 195]). Notably, such a critical reading does not advance any definitive conclusions but "reflects the polysemous nature of symbolic acts" (Conrad, 1985, p. 196). Struggling with the concept of textual authority, Strine and Pacanowsky observe that all texts are situated sociohistorically in relation to other texts and in the finitude

of discursive space must dislodge other texts to receive a hearing (1985, p. 287). Contextuality in this sense is explicitly political and "all texts are ideologically inflected. Their political character is an inherent part of their essential worldliness" (1985, p. 287). This observation is quite compatible with feminists' insistence on the androcentric, patriarchal inflection of the texts privileged in contemporary society; feminist cultural readings attempt to account for the sociohistorical nature of such dominance and give voice to the submerged texts of women's experiences. The importance of this last effort to organizational communication research is evident in Strine and Pacanowsky's conclusion:

> [W]ith the variety of discourses that make up cultural life, an intertextual perspective encompassing the interactive 'voices' of . . . [multiple] texts should provide greater insight into the organizational reality . . . than any single text alone. . . . We propose, then, that no one authorial position can be seen as most responsive to the complex nuances of organizational life. To best convey those textured insights requires polyphonic authority (1985, p. 297).

Feminist readings challenge the authority of men as the sole authors of cultural texts. And if the absence and systematic suppression of women's voices is not justification enough to explore the feminist perspective on organizational culture, the ethical theme of organizational culture research developed by Deetz virtually mandates a hearing for women's voices:

> Social and organizational practices frequently limit such [full] representation [of differing people and their interests] and distort human development. The ethical responsibility of cultural research is to isolate limitations on representation, to facilitate greater interest representation through understanding and critiquing organizational practices, and to contribute to continued cultural formation (1985, p. 254).

As a matter of practice and principle, then, the feminist perspective on organizational culture should be a concern on any agenda for organizational communication research. But in particular, those who profess an interpretive perspective and take organizational culture as their primary research interest ought to be both disturbed and stimulated by feminist critiques and alternatives.

III. Organizational Culture: A Radical Alternative?

In summary, two criticisms have been made of the organizational culture approach that challenge its claim as a radical alternative to traditional perspectives on organizations. The first regards the implicit dualisms attending the concept of culture itself: culture as a rational, public and male domain is held antithetical to and privileged over nature as the domain of emotion, the private sphere and women (cf. Ortner, 1974; Leacock and Nash, 1977; Griffin, 1981). Jaggar summarizes this criticism as follows:

> The long western philosophical tradition equates women and "the feminine" with nature, men and "the masculine" with culture. That tradition has been explicitly misogynistic. Women have been seen as closer to animals, both because they lacked reason and because the functioning of their bodies has been thought to commit them to the repetitive biological reproduction of the species. Men's bodies, by contrast, have been thought to allow them to transcend this biological repetition through the creation of "culture." (1983, p. 97).

Redding (1979) admonished communication scholars to be more sensitive to the philosophical associations and implications of "borrowed" concepts. Yet the unreflective adoption of a notion of culture inscribed with patriarchal inflections suggests that

Redding's warning has yet to be heeded.

The second criticism marks a silence: the literature on organizational culture, particularly that published by communication scholars, offers little discursive space for the articulation of the marginalized experience of women in organizations; rather, as unreflectively descriptive, such studies participate in and perpetuate the hegemonic submergence of women's voices.

The first of these criticisms may be illustrated by taking up two areas of particular interest in current organizational culture studies: organizational rationality and organizational conflict, addressed through the study of subcultures. The second involves scrutiny of the practices of organizational scholarship.

IV. Organizational Rationality and Subcultural Conflict

A. Organizational Rationality

The feminist indictments of the dualisms inherent in prevailing conceptions of culture and rationality are of particular relevance given the critique of rationality purportedly underwriting the development of the organizational culture perspective. Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982) advanced both a rationale and a charter when they argued that to address organizations as cultures is to call into question the privileging of instrumental, teleological rationalities. Documenting the effort by organizational scholars to take up this charter, Smircich proposed a categorization of cultural approaches that convincingly maps out the territory of cultural

research as the "expressive, nonrational qualities of the experience of organization" (1983, p. 354). Putnam and Pacanowsky (1983) located the organizational culture alternative within an interpretive "paradigm" that emerged out of specific dissatisfactions and disagreements with the traditional "rational-functionalist paradigm" governing organizational communication theory and research. Notably, the "unitary view of organizations" as "cooperative systems in pursuit of common interests" in which individuals "become instruments of purposeful-rational action aimed at technological effectiveness and organizational efficiency" was to be challenged by a "pluralistic view of organizations" as "an array of factionalized groups with diverse purposes and goals" in which individuals "negotiate" the goals, meanings, and actions that constitute organizational realities (Putnam, 1983, pp. 36-37).

But a cursory survey of published studies suggests that despite the promise of the organizational culture approach to deconstruct the tacit understandings and biases of organizational meanings and practices, it has failed to notice those dualisms underwriting patriarchial and bureaucratic modes of life. For example, Trujillo's (1983, 1985) managers perform in a male world devoid of female presence; Barley's (1983) morticians and their clients are essentially genderless (and most decidedly sexless); the heroes celebrated by Peters and Waterman (1982) and Deal and Kennedy (1982) are cast in a male mold--any women among them are pseudo-male, that is, women "making it" like a man, playing by men's rules in a man's world; and neither book mentions women as either heroes or anti-heroes. Finally, the claim that the real

product of organizations is people (Pacanowsky, 1979; Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982) is impoverished without the reproductive experience as model (Hartsock, 1983). [1]

B. Subcultures and Conflict

Those whose studies emphasize subcultural conflict (Riley, 1983; Martin, Sitkin, and Boehm, 1985) similarly ignore the fundamental contradictions posed by sex/gender and forego the opportunity to develop the revolutionary potential of a feminist perspective as one of resistance and subversion threatening the hegemonic order of the contemporary bureaucratic-patriarchial organization. For example, Van Maanen and Barley (1985) advocate the study of organizational cultures as the study of organizational conflict and subcultural activity within the "veiled political economies" of organizational life. Yet their analysis of the social processes and variables attending the formation, interaction, and dissolution of subcultures completely ignores the valorization of patriarchal values and male/masculine experiences within the political economy of complex formal organizations. The authors appear oblivious to the way sex/gender cuts across any of the morphological subcultures (like professional or departmental) that they concern themselves with.

C. Organizational Scholarship

Most organizational communication studies addressing issues of sex or gender are empirical studies on sex differences (see, for example, the literature reviews by Baird [1976] and Walfoort [1986]). Putnam (1982) decries the shortcomings of such

theorizing and research, charging that artificial dichotomizing, unreflective adoption of stereotypical categories and metaphors, and the bracketing of sex-role power differentials and contradictions mar contemporary social science investigations. Walfoort concludes an extensive review of the past two decades of gender research by organizational scholars with a challenge to communication scholars to undertake observational field studies rather than the attributional studies that characterize gender research. She argues, "Because the first method is overlooked, and the second overworked, pervasive images of women in management become persuasive fictions. The two become confused or confounded" (1986, p. 20). Walfoort's admonition should be taken to include researcher attributions as well as those garnered through self-report instruments or interviews. As Jehlen remarks, "all vision is mediated" (1982, p. 195); naturalistic observation is always positioned within a field of ideological inflections and the traditional position of (ad)vantage has been masculine.

Accordingly, Smircich (1985) argues that the study of organizational culture should include the analysis of the sex/gender bias permeating both the production of knowledge about organizational cultures and the production/reproduction of the prevailing social order within and between organizations. She advises, "[A]n important and necessary aspect of a cultural paradigm for organizational analysis is the addition of a feminist voice to the discussion on organizational life" (1985, p. 67). The implications of Smircich's advice go well beyond an "add-women-and-stir" directive: a feminist voice mandates a

radical change in the conventions of organizational scholarship. [2]

Such a change is misconceived if merely overlaid rather than taken as a reconstruction of the prevailing practices of scholarship. Jehlen (1982) argues that women's writing is itself an act of resistance and potential revolution. McRobbie argues against the absence of the authorial self in social science writing; she charges, "This absence of self and the invalidating of personal experience in the name of the more objective social sciences goes hand in hand with the silencing of other areas [the sphere of family and domestic life], which are for feminists of the greatest importance" (1981, p. 113). She advocates the revelation of personal experience and interests because "our autobiographies invade and inform what we write" (1981, p. 113). [3]

Smircich's recent work (1985a, 1985b) is illustrative of a self-conscious effort to illustrate the links between the personal, the political, and the professional. She confesses "love for her students" in one essay and openly struggles with a tentative, preliminary formulation of "A Woman-Centered Theory of Organization" in the other. In the latter, she argues that a critical feminist rereading of research into organizational behaviors and practices suggests that male patterns of thinking and valuing and masculine behavioral patterns and the dominant bureaucratic form of organizing are coterminous. Indeed, "The dominant mode of organizing is congruent with a male mode of being in the world" (1985b, p. 9) and "most organizations are masculine in their values and modes of operation" (1985b, p. 12).

This interpretation of organizational life comes under scrutiny in a feminist analysis and alternative interpretations are constructed from the data of women's experiences and consciousness. For example, the pervasiveness of cultural sex/gender stereotypes as well as the epistemological split between subject/object and the consequent effort to control that is the basis for regulative management are countered by an epistemology that assumes no subject/object split and seeks ecological balance, replacing regulative with "appreciative" management (1985b, p. 14). A feminist perspective embraces plurality and diversity [4], interjecting marginalized voices with disparate interpretations and disrupting the presumption of unity and seamlessness in bureaucratic discourse. Hence, in both organizational and scholarly discourse, a feminist perspective "will include greater tolerance for 'deviant' modes of discourse" (1985b, p. 15).

Balsamo (1985) argues that at present there is little such tolerance. Hers is a deviant voice marginalized in the traditional discourse of organizational studies. She adamantly rejects the conservative "gender as variable" perspective as well as liberal reformist efforts to integrate women into status quo power relationships and social structures and practices that inherently devalue women's lived experiences. Characteristically within these perspectives "women's experiences have been evaluated as pathologically deviant when compared to men's" (1985, p. 18). Instead, she develops a radical feminist critique of the practices and structures of both organizational life and the academic world that studies it.

Balsamo's criticisms go beyond mere grousing about the "invisible academy" as an "old boys network" and take up the question of legitimation within the academic community. The insertion of her experiences as a woman into her practice as a scholar interjects alternative forms of knowledge into the feminist scholar's work that challenge the legitimacy of institutionalized practices and sanctified traditions. The politics of scholarship have been dismissed as hallway gossip and excluded from serious consideration as part of the scholarly practice. But as Balsamo observes, "Maintaining the understanding that scholarship is apolitical [and its product is apolitical objective knowledge] conceals the arbitrariness of its organizing rules. Fundamental notions such as authority and legitimacy are never seriously questioned" (1985, p. 18).

Balsamo suggests that in the commitment of traditional scholarship to "democratic scholarship and intellectual pursuits" feminists may find a point of access for the articulation of women's issues and for asserting women's voices as legitimate sources of knowledge. The pivotal notion in this project is "authority." According to Balsamo, "Authority is considered an [sic] learned/earned quality that is related to the ability to objectively speak on an issue or topic, through the appropriation of a specialized language and position within a discourse" (1985, p. 21). Academic disciplines arrange authority hierarchically--most fields grant the status of legitimate scholarship through the legacy of a few "founding fathers"--"'a central father figure serves as a continuing point of regeneration and departure: the Name of the Father is the patronym which unifies the discourse

and the nature of the enterprise'" (Treichler, "Teaching Feminist Theory," in Criticism and Interpretive Theory in the Classroom. Cary Nelson, ed. [Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 1984]; cited in Balsamo, 1985, p. 22). Such patrilineage structures disciplinary boundaries and worldviews and guides the institutionalization of teaching and professional training; it also represses oppositional voices and alternative forms of knowledge. Balsamo's description of her experience as an outcast voice is poignant:

> [An outcast's] participation (or thwarted attempts) will be marked by devaluing statements, quizzical looks, re-interpretation, and distortion. Asserting an illegitimate perspective is often met with blank stares and even hostility. From my experience, feelings are ones of self-doubt, denigration, and humiliation. This is the moment of silencing for any authentic critical or deviant voice. I believe the consequences are severe for the discourse; creativity is repressed, critical voices are disregarded, and the production of knowledge becomes incestuous (1985, p. 23).

Along with the repressive structures and practices of patriarchal academia, radical feminist scholars must confront a paradoxical commitment: to encourage a multiplicity of voices that articulate the differences in the lived-experiences of different women while asserting a commonality in their experiences of oppression to present a united voice of opposition.

There are "radically different, yet interesting, questions" articulated in these confrontations and commitments. They take up the cultural approach as "a way of struggle" against dominant modes of discourse and repressive structures within organizational scholarship. Turned back upon itself, the organizational culture approach takes up the understanding of its own practices and biases as part of its radical interpretation of

organizational life. For example, the following issues raise questions about tacitly accepted practices and structures of organizational scholarship that currently pervade the organizational culture approach:

1) **Systematically obscures and denies the politics of organizational scholarship.** Hierarchical authority structures and a patrilinear tradition delegitimate alternative modes of discourse and forms of knowledge.

2) **Participates in the production and reproduction of hegemonic oppression in the guise of political and moral neutrality.** "Descriptive" studies claiming scientific objectivity accept and in doing so, validate structuring principles of patriarchy, capitalism, and bureaucracy without exploring alternative structures of meaning and experience.

3) **Univocal.** Despite lip-service to polyphonic intertextuality, organizational culture studies give priviliged hearings to male accounts of organizational life. There is an institutionalized deafness to deviant voices, particularly those that challenge the existing order in organizational scholarship.

Earlier sections of this paper suggest that along with issues of scholarship, the notion of "organization as culture" is similarly open to radical question. Among the issues to be confronted are the following:

1) **Ahistorical and androcentric.** Male definitions, experiences, and structures are taken to be generic rather than as historical configurations. There has been little regard for tracing practices or traditions beyond the immediate timeframe.

2) **De-eroticized.** There is little passion or sensuality in

the accounts of organizational culture. Burrell illustrates this criticism in his analysis of the historical process of organizational desexualization. He argues that sexual relations offer "a major 'frontier' of control and resistance in organizational life" (1983, p. 98). Burrell advocates a nonmyopic, eroticized sociology of organizational life, although he holds out little hope for a feminist discourse and contends that eroticized theorizing may be related to feminist scholarship but will probably be male-dominated (1983, p. 115). Given the current politics of scholarship, he is probably correct.

3) **Oversimplified and reductionistic.** Organizational culture is often treated as monolithic rather than as the conflictual conjuncture of multiple cultures and subcultures; there is little analysis of cultural relations of dominance and subordination nor of the modes of resistance and struggle that continually threaten the hegemony of dominant cultures. When subcultural conflict is addressed, it is through a masculine model of competitiveness that disallows alternatives such as the feminist notions of diversity within community and responsible autonomy.

4) **Valorizes the male experience as normative.** Most conceptualizations adopt without critique the culture:male/nature:female dichotomy in which deviance is ascribed to the second half of the pair, justifying control by the first. Thus, by definition, if the female experience of organizational culture is qualitatively different than the male experience, hers is deviant.

These sets of issues offer possibilities for the rearticulation of both research questions and practices by those who would take a cultural approach to the study of organizations. Exemplary of cultural study sensitive to such issues is the work of Kathy Ferguson on bureaucracy and Angela McRobbie on subcultural conflict. Both advance feminist alternatives that take up the radical potential of an organizational culture approach.

VI. Feminist Alternatives

A. Kathy Ferguson, The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy

Ferguson (1984) develops a radical feminist perspective on organizational life that confronts the domination of bureaucratic discourse and practices. Though not an explicit cultural analysis, her work is particularly sensitive to the symbols and meanings of organizational life. In addition, her initial assumptions are compatible with those professed by interpretive organizational culture scholars. She asserts her belief in the essential symbol-using capacity of humankind and her focus on discursive practices in the public domain suggests the rhetorical dimension of human experience.

Following Foucault, she holds discourse to be a form of practice, the characteristic ways of speaking and writing that both constitute personal experience and reflect the structures and practices of social living "within a politically laden field of meaning" (1984, p. 59). In contemporary life, it is bureaucratic discourse that dominates and penetrates every aspect of our lives. Bureaucratic discourse is formulated upon a

bifurcation of reason and emotion. Ferguson notes that this bifurcation legitimates only individual self-interests (or altrustic self-sacrifice) as the basis for rational choice.

In contrast, feminist rationality recognizes rational choice-making as founded not in the separation of self and others but in a connectedness with others: "rationality becomes a trait characterizing their [self and others] relations, and their choices within relations" while interests are defined not in terms of the separated individual but in terms of a mutually constituting inter-relatedness (1984, p. 190). Knowledge in the feminist view is "created through personal and concrete interactions, by following examples" and is "personal, concrete, particularistic, contextual" (1984, p. 160)--an active, personal accounting rather than the passive, spectator form of knowledge characterizing modern epistemology.

The notions of democratic participation, communal responsibility, and reflective critique inform the alternative Ferguson develops. She distinguishes between the distanced, received knowledgeability of <u>logos</u> premised in authority (of demonstration, fact, bureaucratic position, technical expertise) and the immediate, intimate knowledgeability of <u>mythos</u> premised in accountability (of character, circumstance, relational responsibility). Both gender and rationality are socially constituted and perpetuated (or changed); both are product and paradigm for the dominant and subversive patterns guiding structural and relational social production and reproduction. There is a dialectic tension involved: subordination to

bureaucratic or patriarchal authority produces the agents and conditions of resistance; accountability is no assurance against culturally favored but oppressive patterns of judgment just as the caretaking dimension of women's lived experiences "alone offers no standards by which to judge and/or construct a democratic public order: the connections among people could as easily be nurtured by a benevolent despotism, in which the rulers do what is best for us, as they could be by participatory democracy" (1984, pp. 172-173).

The revolutionary potential of the feminist cultural vision is celebrated in Ferguson's work. She recovers an alternative feminist culture based on the lived experiences of women as caretakers, in radical opposition to the feminized identity developed through their lived experiences as victims of oppression.

Ferguson's work is exemplary as a feminist analysis of negotiation and resistance in the organization and the deep structural contradictions of bureaucracy marked by gender. She argues that the hegemony of the bureaucratic order is not seamless: imposing itself as a universalistic and inevitable form of life, it is nonetheless a site of ongoing struggle, structurally riddled with contradictions, historically contingent, and conflictual.

Ferguson argues that power and resistance are dialectical; the discursive and institutional domination of bureaucracy is incomplete despite its universalistic claims. Bureaucratic power is created through discursive mystification and the alienating experience of depoliticization that attends the penultimate

bureaucratic goals of control and elimination of uncertainty; it succeeds through the recursive social reproduction of bureaucratic institutional forms and practices and through the individual's reproduction of a sense of self as commodity. She explains:

> The enormous force behind technocratic imperialism comes not from the absence of any resistance, or the inherent inability of individuals or groups to imagine alternatives, but from the tremendous pervasiveness of bureaucratization, its capacity to coopt, marginalize, and destroy its opposition. . . . Part of the perniciousness of bureaucracy is that . . . it seeks to "tie up our loose ends" and reduce us to a reflection of the organization. . . . When our circumstances are increasingly bureaucratic, then the process of creating oneself through interaction with others is debased and the self that is created is simply a rationalized commodity readied for exchange in the bureaucratic market (1984, pp. 19-20).

But bureaucratic pervasiveness is never total and individuals both succumb and resist, creating themselves in accordance with and in opposition to bureaucratic identities. Ferguson insightfully discusses the discursive competencies of the feminized subcultures within bureaucracies (involving mastery of cloying survival or back-biting success strategies) and the strategies of feminist revolution against bureaucracies (involving a different set of criteria taking connectedness and an ethic of care as the basis for democratic decision-making).

Ferguson examines bureaucratic functionaries and clients/customers as "the second sex" caught in subordinate, submissive patterns of interaction and she offers the positive values of feminism (relational caretaking and cooperative participation) as the basis for resistance and struggle against the disciplinary power of bureaucratic institutionalization. The

subordinate dimension of women's lived experiences offers analogous insight into the strategies and survival tactics of any oppressed class, more particularly, the "victims" of bureaucratic domination. The caretaking dimension suggests trajectories for alternative personal and societal orders that deny hierarchy and competition for autonomy without isolation and community without conformity. The implications of women's caretaking experience and the feminist vision of personal action and communal structures and processes create a discourse of revolutionary potential.

The potential of the feminist perspective as a political alternative emerges from the marginality of women's experiences, in the subjugated values of caretaking, connectedness, and empathy, in the silence of women's voices within the dominant discourse. To break this silence, to give voice to the submerged discourse expressing women's experiences is to repoliticize the bureaucratic and patriarchal context. This project denies the bureaucratic claim to political neutrality and objectivity, recognizing the reconstitution of female subjectivity as a political act and holding the very possibility for language and knowledge as conditioned within power relations. Its political agenda entails giving voice to an alternative discourse that can challenge bureaucratic domination and redefine its constitutive political terms: "To resist the meanings that deny or devalue women through the creation of an alternative discourse is a political activity" (1984, pp. 165-166).

Ferguson argues that feminist theory can foster and support

resistance to the increasing ubiquity of bureaucratic discourse by engendering change through personalized confrontation with institutionalized limitations. She holds feminist theorizing as political action capable of altering the social structures of domination/subordination and the depoliticizing/desexualizing discursive practices of contemporary bureaucracy. The basic terms of political life (reason, power, freedom, community) are reformulated in feminist discourse in terms of women's experiences and in accord with feminist principles: "Feminist discourse can interject into public debate a reformulation of the legitimate concern for community. Feminist discourse can provide a way of thinking and acting that is neither an extension of bureaucratic forms nor a mirror image of them, but rather a genuinely radical voice in opposition" (1984, p. 29).

B. Angela McRobbie, Subcultural Struggle and Resistance

The work on subcultural forms of resistance and struggle developed at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, England, suggests by analogy the potential of a feminist analysis of organizational culture adopting this approach. According to Clarke, et al., (1981) there are always multiple cultural configurations coexisting at any historical moment. However, one configuration reflecting the interests and position of the most powerful members of a society will achieve recognition as the dominant social-cultural order. This dominant culture,

> . . . represents itself as the culture. It tries to define and contain all other cultures within its inclusive range. Its views of the world,

> unless challenged, will stand as the most natural, all-embracing, universal culture. Other cultural configurations will not only be subordinate to this dominant order: they will enter into struggle with it, seek to modify, negotiate, resist or even overthrow its reign -- its hegemony" (Clark, et al., 1981, p. 12).

Even during its hegemonic moment, a dominant culture is never a monolithic or homogeneous structure but is layered by different interests, historical traces, as well as emergent elements. The relations of domination and subordination among cultures inspire continual negotiation, resistance, and struggle. Even when experienced as "'normalized repression,'" the subordinate cultures develop a repertoire of strategies and responses for coping and resisting that mobilize certain material and social elements into supports (Clark, et al., 1981, p. 44). Cultural conflict is thus historically specific and its strategies emergent.

Subcultures are "sub-sets" of larger cultural configurations. Characteristically, they take on the same basic problematic of the parent configuration while taking shape around their own distinctive activities, values, focal concerns, and territorial spaces (Clarke, et al., 1981, pp. 14-15). Following Cohen, Clarke, et al., suggest that subcultures play out this problematic through an "imaginary relation" to the material, economic and social conditions of lived-experience (1981, p. 33). They develop a "subcultural resolution" of the problematic based on this imaginary relation. Hegemony works through such imaginary relations, not as false ideas, perceptions or definitions but "primarily by inserting the subordinate class into the key institutions and structures which support the power

and social authority of the dominant order" (Clarke, et al., 1981, p. 39). In this case, the subordinate sex is inserted into the institutions and structures of bureaucracy through a process of "feminization" which draws on women's experiences of oppression and submission.

Treating women's experience as the basis for a subordinate but potentially revolutionary culture or a process of insertion into the hegemonic cultural order of the organization means that those experiences cannot be dismissed as marginal or unimportant. Rather, such a view encourages the investigation of the ways and forms through which women have negotiated space or struggled against cultural domination. For example, McRobbie claims that in their daily lives, feminists "wage semiotic warfare" against the hegemonic sociocultural order:

> Knitting in pubs, breast-feeding in Harrods, the refusal to respond to expressions of street sexism, the way we wear our clothes--all the signs and meanings embodied in the way we handle our public visibility play a part in the culture which, like the various youth cultures, bears the imprint of our collective, historical creativity. They are living evidence that although inscribed within structures, we are not wholly prescribed by them (1981, p. 122).

The nuances of feminist "semiotic warfare" in the boardrooms and the assembly lines of contemporary organizations offers an intriguing direction for research into organizational culture.

McRobbie and Garber's (1976) inquiry into the invisibility of girls in studies of male youth subcultures includes another heuristic suggestion for the investigation of women's invisibility in organizational cultures. "The important question," they argue, "may not be the absence or presence of girls in the male sub-cultures, but the complementary ways in

which girls interact among themselves and with each other to form a distinctive culture of their own" (1976, p. 219). They conclude their inquiry with the observation that "when the dimension of sexuality is included in the study of youth subcultures, girls can be seen to be negotiating a different space, offering a different type of resistance to what can at least in part be viewed as their sexual subordination" (1976, p. 221). McRobbie and Garber call this negotiation "structured secondariness" and suggest that women's primary involvement in the subordinate, complementary private sphere of the family structures their involvement in the organization as an alternative network of activities and responses. This is not to say that women's involvement in organizations mirrors their involvement in the private sphere, although there has often been an assumption of the sort--for example, the secretary as the boss's "second wife." But the elements of the private sphere--relational intimacy, emotionality, caretaking, kinship, sensuality--are elements that counter the desexed, inpersonal structures of the public, patriarchal, bureaucratic organization. Hence, the structured secondariness of women in organizations offers a key to the creativity of subcultural resistance and struggle. Women as a group do not fit into the patriarchal order unless they are "masculated" and adopt a "pseudo-male" identity (become absorbed into the dominant order) or acquiesce to their "insertion" through the processes of feminization, developing strategies for coping and survival. But it may be that women live their oppression in qualitatively different ways by

structuring their experiences on the model of nurturant relations and an embodied sexuality that inherently resists the meanings of the dominant cultural order. For example, a feminist rereading of women's relations with women in the organization might take up the radicalesbian continuum developed by Rich (cited in Ferguson, et al., 1982) to examine those relations as nurturant structures of "women loving women." [5]

Summarily, three modes of negotiation, resistance, and struggle have been suggested as appropriate to a feminist organizational culture study: feminization as a process in which the hegemonic culture inserts subordinate organizational members into the dominant order; subcultural identity in which women draw on private sphere structures and experiences to negotiate space in the dominant order and resolve the bureaucratic problematic in a qualitatively different way than men; and a feminist culture developed as an alternative configuration that threatens not just resistance but revolution in its vision of a new cultural order [6].

VII. Preliminary Agenda and Conclusion

How might the biases and blindness confounding the accomplishment of the radical intentions of the organizational culture approach be redressed? The feminist studies and discussions reviewed above articulate a preliminary agenda for reconstituting the practices and politics of organizational scholarship by developing a feminist discourse commensurate with the radical intent of the organizational culture approach. The following list is meant to be heuristic rather than exhaustive.

1) **Adopt labels to reappropriate the politics of definition.** Balsamo (1985) advises adopting a label (feminism) as a useful political strategy that might distinguish feminism from critical and interpretive theoretical discourses (thus avoiding the threat of sympathetic cooptation) while gaining a hearing within such discourses. The importance of terminology is underscored in Elshtain's (1982) discussion of the ethics of discourse. Elshtain disavows the view of language as "dominion over" and advances a feminist ethics as the basis for an empowering discourse. She finds the definition of terms a point of entry into traditional discourse:

> Meanings evolve slowly as changing social practices, relations, and institutions are characterized in new ways. Over time this helps to give rise to an altered reality, for language evolution is central to reality. Speech that seeks power to transform the world, as well as the human subject, must embrace a political language that moves the subject <u>into</u> the world without locking her into the <u>terms</u> of ongoing social arrangements (1982, p. 140).

2) **Resist absolutes.** In regard to this issue of power, Balsamo (1985) advises radical feminist scholars to resist defining absolutes--whether founding figures, authority, spheres of experience or legitimate voices.

3) **Return an embodied subject to discourse.** Balsamo (1985) argues that radical feminist scholarship must return "an embodied subject to the center of social theory by embracing the lived-experience of sexuality, race, and age as human experiences that create and validate human beings" (1985, p. 26) and must insist on including sexuality as a fundamental human experience and therefore a necessary dimension of any inquiry into social organization.

4) **Establish feminism as a practice of demystification.**

Establishing feminism as a practice of demystification is developed more explicitly in Kristeva's (1982) Freudian-informed notions of feminist discourse. She argues that inscription within the symbolic field of language conventions implies a castration, a separation of the natural oneness of subject and object in the constitution of meaning. She observes that nurturant experiences, those endemic to the conditions of women's lives, deny such separation and difference. Hence, women's place in the symbolic order is one of denial and transgression; it is a signifying space that threatens the social and symbolic relationships of language. Feminism is a moment of demystification of "the symbolic bond itself . . . of the community of language as a universal and unifying tool, one which totalizes and equalizes. In order to bring out--along with the singularity of each person and, even more, along with the multiplicity of every person's possible identifications (with atoms, e.g., stretching from the family to the stars)--the relativity of his/her symbolic as well as biological existence, according to the variation in his/her specific symbolic capacities. And in order to emphasize the responsibility which all will immediately face of putting this fluidity into play against the threats of death which are unavoidable whenever an inside and an outside, a self and an other, one group and another, are constituted" (1982, p. 53).

5) **Effect collaborative practices of scholarship.**

Finally, Balsamo (1985) calls for opportunities that encourage "collaborative, not combative, attempts at developing critical perspectives. Collaborative efforts support the understanding that the enemy is not individuals, but rather the system that we participate in unreflectively. This locates the capability and responsibility for social change with each individual through the self-reflective confrontation of taken-for-granted assumptions and identification of possible biases in their theorizing" (1985, pp. 27-28). The frustrations of attempting collaborative work within the traditional discourse of scholarship have been discussed before (see Hall, 1980, pp. 45-47) as have the difficulties of establishing feminist modes of scholarship as legitimate (see Boxer, 1982).

This preliminary agenda for a feminist discourse poses a profound challenge to organizational communication scholars and particularly to those who study organizational culture. "Feminist thinking is really rethinking" (Jehlen, 1982, p. 189)--at the very least, taking feminist discourse seriously mandates a "radical skepticism" inspiring critical reflection on both the "stuff" and the practices of culture research. It is rethinking that might well bring to fruition the potential of the organizational culture approach to be a truly radical alternative.

ENDNOTES

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[1] The critical-interpretive approach has been distinguished from the cultural approach for its emancipatory project (Putnam, 1983). Yet even those scholars fail to consider the androcentric and misogynist cast of organizational culture and rationality. For example, Deetz and Kersten (1983) analyze organizational ideology as the rationalization of an existing social order that mystifies and reifies conditions of material and symbolic domination. However, they do not consider the way women's experiences contradict the ideological constitution of desexed and gender-neutral subjects. In another essay, Conrad and Ryan (1985) critique the constitution of self within hierarchical power relationships through processes of rationalization. Their analysis does not take into account the constitution of the female as a subjugated self nor women's resistance to such interpellation.

[2] The phrase "add-women-and-stir method" was coined by Charlotte Bunch at a panel discussion, "Visions and Revisions: Women and the Power to Change" (NWSA Conventio, Lawrence, Kansas, June 1979); excerpts were published in Women's Studies Newsletter 7 (Summer 1979); cited in Boxer (1982), p. 258.

[3] Current experiments in ethnographic writing and theorizing are germane to the feminist impulse toward dialogic and autobiographical presentation. See George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer, Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), and James Clifford and George E. Marcus, Eds., Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

[4] Plurality is not uncontested in feminist thought: Spivak writes, "To embrace pluralism . . . is to espouse the politics of the masculinist establishment. Pluralism is the method emploved by the central authorities to neutralize opposition by seeming to accept it. The gesture of pluralism on the part of the marginal can only mean capitulation to the center" (Gayatri Spivak, A Response to Annette Kolodny," unpublished ms., Department of English, University of Texas at Austin, 1980; cited in Marcus, 1982, p. 218).

[5] Rich's "lesbian continuum describes a wide range of 'woman-identified experience. . . . [expanded] to embrace many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support'" (Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 5 [Summer 1980]: 648; cited in Ferguson, et al., 1982, pp. 148-149).

[6] There are some difficulties that must be admitted in advancing these Marxian concepts within a feminist perspective. One concerns the continuing controversy among feminist thinkers over the appropriateness of the Marxist theoretic; see Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism edited by Sargent (1981). Another concerns a matter of inconsistency: the notion of "insertion" implies a passiveness and a mechanistic action that seems incompatible with the feminist assertion of individual creativity and praxis. This problem would have to be worked through in a more fully developed version of the sketch offered in this paper. A third matter for consideration is definitional: the coalitional processes of cultural configuration and the negotiation processes of subcultural resistance and survival are generally understood against the background of a male definition of competition (based on aggressive self-interest and antagonism) rather than a feminist notion of accommodative conflict (based on a respect for diversity and autonomy).

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